

231: The Mood Booster at Your Fingertips



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Jen Riday

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You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 231. We're talking about how creativity and using your hands can be a huge mood booster. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey my friends, I want to talk to you today about creativity and using your hands. Recently I noticed my mood was spiraling and I couldn't figure out why. I tried to do my morning routine consistently. I was getting mostly enough sleep, I was drinking water, I had enough vitamin D. I did all the things I know how to do and yet I was just feeling tired of my life. Has that ever happened to you?

Well, the day came when I said on a Wednesday morning, "I'm not working today." I had so much to do that day and I didn't login to my computer, I didn't check my email, I put my phone away for the most part. And I did what my heart desired. And guess what I desired? Using my hands, creating something, I made nine loaves of zucchini bread with my daughter Lorelei.

I painted the front door. I painted the girls' bedroom. By the way, I'm an awesome painter; I'm so good at trim work. Even my husband who doesn't give compliments said, "Wow, you're doing that without tape. How do you do that?" And I was so proud, so proud. And I felt so satisfied at the end of the day and I couldn't figure out, okay, it's just painting; it's just some zucchini bread. But it's been a really long time since I've done something like that, with the kids all home and I have an online business. And sometimes I think I don't have time for stuff like that.

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But I've noticed sometimes when I'm on the computer, or online, or have my phone, or we're also not engaging a lot while we're at home. I have had an increasingly big craving to do things with my hands and to create. So I want to ask you if that's you? And maybe you're not sure yet.

But have you felt just a general bit of malaise, lower mood, dissatisfaction, an itching for something to be different but you don't know what it is? And you might think, I need to connect with people, and that could be true. But I wonder do you have an itch or an urge to create, to use your hands for a repetitive task?

When I was growing up on the farm in Southwest Iowa, both sets of grandparents lived within three miles of us, and we saw each other a lot. We saw cousins and we were constantly using our hands. When I was a little girl, I was way into forts. It was my own version of HGTV. I would create forts wherever I went, little houses where we would have a kitchen, and we would have a bedroom. And I would tend to boss my brother around and say, "No, this is the kitchen, this is the bedroom." But I loved creating this space, this little world.

One time I dragged a bunch of fence posts, wooden fence posts clear across my parents' kind of yard area, farmyard area, and I built my own log cabin. So one wooden post, one wooden post and then two across them and alternating all the way up. I was doing the whole Laura Ingalls Wilder thing, Little House on the Prairie. My mom eventually came and we got that log cabin up to our shoulders, she looked, she was like, "Alright, well, you guys have to put all this back." And that wasn't the funnest part to put it all back, but man, I felt so good creating these little forts.

Gardening, we did gardening all the time. I remember sitting with relatives and shucking corn. And then we would all go into the kitchen and use our electric knife and cut the corn off and freeze it in freezer bags. And I

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remember cooking with my grandma after we had picked a ton of strawberries together. We were always using our hands.

Well, research shows us today that using your hands, especially in a repetitive way is therapeutic. It gives your brain a rest to repetitively stimulate both sides of your brain by using both of your hands. This can also happen when you walk by using both of your feet; just repetitive movement is very restful. Well, a lot of us have picked up on a cultural phenomenon where we act like laundry, I'm never going to get the laundry done, oh my gosh, the dishes. But what if we all just stopped and said, "Hey, this is my therapy, my brain needs this rest."

You turn on some music, you involve a child or someone you love and make it a conversation, just like the good old days. Now, we can expand this and make it creative as well, knitting, card making, gardening, crocheting, sewing, scrapbooking, leather working, bee keeping, my husband does that, embroidery, painting, baking, my favorites.

Ever since Covid started I had such an urge to garden, oh my goodness, we've had so much fun in that garden and so much connection over that garden. We are all out there every day because we created it together, all of us go look at it. Look, Lorelei's watermelons are growing. Look, the Sungold tomatoes are finally getting flowers. We planted them late by seed in June, and they're actually growing, they're plants with flowers now. I'm so proud of myself. I know, you experienced gardeners, roll your eyes.

But hey, we the Riday family did something with our hands that also built connection and felt creative, it is so juicy. I also love to bake, you heard that, one day I baked nine loaves of zucchini bread, interestingly, four of them are already gone and it wasn't that long ago. Come on Ridays, slow it down.

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Anyway, what can you do to use your hands and that you might have a good attitude about it? How can you change your attitude about the things you're already doing with your hands, and what else can you add? I predict it will add some juice, some oomph, some satisfaction and contentment that might be missing from your life. Think about the good old days. Think about the books you've read from older times, or maybe you experienced as a child. Try to add some of that back into your life, it feels good.

And kids these days, high schoolers' anxiety rates are four times higher than they've ever been. And people thought it must be all the screens. But what if it's simply the lack of using their hands, which is so therapeutic? Research shows that using your hands decreases stress, anxiety and depression, and it increases dopamine, it really essentially makes you feel good. So I find it super interesting.

Some other benefits are that you can see your results, if you're just doing something online or doing a spreadsheet, you can't really see it, but you can see and touch your results. It strengthens your mind, body connection. It can strengthen community if you do it with other people. It can strengthen your respect for elders, because a lot of times elders have skills in using their hands that they pass down.

I know that was true for me, my grandma was so good at gardening, and she taught me how to do it. We would pick strawberries together, I remember making peach pie together and it was fun. My own mom, super great at gardening, I still mimic some of her skills today, it's so, so good for us.

Now, your excuses, what stops you or what has stopped you from using your hands in the past? I want you to analyze these excuses one by one and resolve that you're going to do this; it's so good for you. It's so good for your kids. This is a mental health need and I hadn't known that before

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recently and I want to spread the word. I experienced it for myself and I was surprised at how good I felt.

So our excuses, it will be too messy. Bring on the mess. I don't have enough time. Yeah, you don't have enough time to feel good? There are repetitive tasks that need to be done, just call it a self-care moment now. You might think it's dangerous, getting out the glue gun, your kids could die. No, they're going to be okay. You might be thinking we have enough stuff; we don't need to create anything else. We have enough stuff around here. No, but do you really?

Maybe you think my kids, you know, this is a digital world, we don't have time to do arts and crafts or gardening or baking. They need to learn how to code. Yeah, really? Okay, I'll give it to you, typing is bilateral stimulation but there's something else that happened for me when I made that zucchini bread, or when I painted, using my hands, seeing a tangible result, having my hands on a physical object, it felt so good. My brain had been craving it and I had no idea.

So I want to challenge you to think of something you're going to do, to use your hands in a way that feels positive to you. And know this, your brain has multiple parts that all work together when we create things. And it stimulates the neural connections in all these areas and those include the frontal lobe, this is where we plan and solve problems.

The parietal lobe, this is where we organize complex visual material, the occipital lobe, where we process visual information. The temporal lobe, this is where we form memories and we process verbally and learn new things. And then finally the cerebellum, which helps us to time our movements and have eye hand coordination. So you're stimulating all of that by working with a tangible physical object. And if you do it with other people you're getting verbal, you're connecting, so much goodness from this.

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I want to challenge you to create with your hands this week and notice how it makes you feel. And then get a little bit nuanced and fine tune this and start to create in the ways that feel the juiciest. I can tell you this, I'm going to be doing a lot more painting and we have a heck of a lot of zucchini, so I'll probably be making more zucchini bread.

Now, I want to end with a quote. Mary Lou Cook said, "Creativity is experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun." So go create this week and let me know how it feels, you deserve to feel amazing. And maybe that missing piece for you and your kids was using your hands more often.

Alright my friends, this has been fun. I am sending you all my love and I will see you again next time. Until then, make it a vibrant and happy week. Take care.

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